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ACCOUNT OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF A MEETING

OF THE P E O P L E,

In a Field near Copenhagen-House.

THURSDAY, NOV. 12th

INCLUDING THE SUBSTANCE OF THE SPEECHES OF
CITIZENS DUANE, THELWALL, JONES, &c.

WITH THE

P E T I T I O N S

TO THE

KING, LORDS, AND COMMONS,
OF NEARLY FOUR HUNDRED THOUSAND BRITONS,
INHABITANTS OF LONDON AND ITS ENVIRONS.

Assembled together in the open Air, to express their Free Sentiments.

According to the Tenure of the Bill of Rights

ON THE SUBJECT OF THE
THREATENED INVASION OF THEIR RIGHTS

BY A

CONVENTION BILL.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR CITIZEN LEE, AT THE TREE OF LIBERTY,
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1795.

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MEETING

OF THE

PEOPLE.

COPENHAGEN - HOUSE,

THURSDAY, NOV. 12.

THE Day-Star of Liberty has once more shone resplendent on the efforts of the People, in repelling the advances of arbitrary Encroachments on their Rights; and this day, in defiance of a PROCLAMATION, which every rational mind knows is not Law, upwards of *three hundred thousand People*, most of them highly respectable even from their situation in life, and all of them more so from the decency, gravity, and decorum of their demeanour and behaviour, assembled (according to advertisements given at a very short notice) in a large field near Copenhagen-House. The philosophical and reflecting mind had never, perhaps, a finer opportunity of contemplating the mental energies of so vast a number of fellow creatures, as on this memorable day, when thousands of free-born Britons

poured from every quarter of this overgrown Metropolis, to express their abhorrence, in a constitutional manner, at one of the most barefaced, arbitrary measures that ever defiled the page of history, of a country which had the smallest pretension to call itself free.

The Meeting was appointed by the advertisement, to take place at eleven o'clock in the morning—but the immense crowds that appeared to be approaching from all quarters, loudly demanded, that, in justice to the importance and solemnity of the occasion, the opening of the proceedings should be for some time deferred. At half past twelve o'clock, Citizens Hodgson, Thelwall, and Ashley, from three of the rostra, erected at convenient distances, for the better accommodation of every one present, explained to the company the mode of proceeding which the Society had determined to adopt—which was, to read the several Resolutions and Petitions which were intended to be offered to the consideration of the Meeting, at the respective rostra; and to take the votes for and against them in the following manner. viz. That each person giving his vote for the affirmative, should hold up his hand, on a white handkerchief being elevated from the rostra, as soon as the question was put; and that immediately after this being determined, those who were of a contrary opinion should in the same manner signify the same, by holding up their hands, on a hat being elevated from the rostra, immediately after putting the question. To avoid repetition on this head, it is with the highest satisfaction we relate the fact, that in the course of the whole day's proceedings, not one single dissentient hand was held up. These preparatory measures having been taken, about one o'clock, Citizen Ashley, in the name of the Committee of the London Corresponding Society, proposed Citizen Duane to fill the Chair, which being unanimously agreed to,

Citizen Duane took the Chair accordingly.

He addressed the Assembly in a brief, but energetic manner; he said, the Meeting of the day proved that a Proclamation was not a Law: he said, that their last Meeting had offended the vicious Administration, which now destroyed the country more than the disgraces and disasters which had attended the military operations on the Continent: he was proud, however, to say, that they had Charters for their Meeting, which, until now, had never been attempted to be even doubted.

The fifth Article of the Bill of Rights entitled them to petition; and Magna Charta had, by the seventh Article, LONG—LONG before, justified resistance to any encroachment upon the Liberties of the nation. He then asserted the right of public Meetings and private deliberations; the necessity of private and public opinion, and free discussion on all topics which could interest or affect men. He recommended measures of peace and firmness—but he said, that it would remain with the people of this country to determine, how long they would bear innovation on their liberties, an unnatural war, and the invasion of their domestic rights, by every species of arbitrary usurpation and the detestable measures which were now attempted to be introduced, in violation of all those dear and sacred privileges which the efforts and blood of their ancestors, in a series of ages, had secured to them.

He then adverted to the measures which now created such universal alarm, apprehension, and distraction; he opposed it against the honest fears and educated habits of Englishmen; he displayed the present and the future circumstances of Britons, should the measures now in agitation be carried into effect.

He very warmly painted the conduct and temper of Englishmen in former periods, and contrasted their present condition with those "*happy times*." He again reverted to the conduct of Britons on all occasion—how jealous of their liberties, how generous in their indulgence to men whom they could not suspect.

In the present times, he said, suspicion was a cardinal virtue, and prudence a rule of conduct which no honest man could be safe in departing from. It becomes men to be steady, like their ancestors, and to adopt measures of prudence from the great examples which were before them.

He then generally alluded to the conduct, measure, and opinion of administration, and appeared to feel, that he was embarrassed with a sensibility which we cannot express a sense of in adequate terms.

He then proceeded to open the matter before him, and read the Resolutions and Addresses which are annexed.

We offer the following as sketches (taken in short-hand) of the different Addresses; but will not vouch for their precise accuracy, though we can assert, that their spirit and substance is preserved.

TO THE KING's MOST EXCELLENT MAJESTY.

The Address, Remonstrance, and Petition of many Thousands of the Inhabitants of London and its environs, associated with the London Corresponding Society—the legal but determined Advocates of British Constitutional Liberty, as established by the principles of the Revolution in 1688.

SIRE,

IT is with no small degree of diffidence and anxiety, that we approach you once more, to present to your Majesty the griefs and complaints of an over-burthened People, whom the misconduct and arbitrary counsels of your Majesty's Ministers, are rapidly driving to the verge of desperation. Twice before, within the last five months, have we attempted in vain, to pour our grievances into your Royal ear, and to convince your Majesty, that the measures recently pursued by administration, as they have a direct tendency to reduce your people to the last degree of human misery, and, consequently, to excite discontent against your Majesty's government, are, in reality, hostile to your Majesty's authority, and inimical to your real interests. But, alas! our complaints, however well-founded—our Petitions, however constitutional, have been passed over in silent neglect, and we have reason to believe, have been prevented even from coming to your Majesty's knowledge, by the artifices of persons in high authority who surround you, and who have an interest in preventing your Majesty from being made acquainted with the real condition and sentiments of the nation.

Instead of Redress, therefore, we have met with Calumny; —instead of *alleviation* of existing oppressions, we are threatened with the total *extinction* of our yet remaining liberties, Parliamentary corruption, and an unjust and ruinous war, have reduced us to beggary and famine; and when we call for the reformation of the *one*, and the relinquishment of the *other*,

Bills are brought into Parliament by your Majesty's Ministers, which make it FELONY and HIGH TREASON, to give a tongue to those miseries we cannot but feel !!!

But, *while it is yet Legal*—while Magna Charta and the Bill of Rights still remain in force !!!—BEFORE these tremendous Bills, which threaten to overthrow the Constitutional Throne of the House of Brunswick, and to establish the Despotism of the exiled Stuarts, pass into a law—we assemble once more, called together by the strong sentiment of DUTY to ourselves, to our Posterity, and to your Majesty, whose safety is involved in these *unparalleled measures*, to express, in a manner at once firm and constitutional, the sense we entertain of them, and our well-founded apprehensions of the dreadful consequences with which they must be attended.

At the same time permit us to conjure your Majesty, in the most solemn manner, to distrust the sincerity of those, who, with insidious professions of zeal and attachment to your personal safety and aggrandisement, would persuade you to aim at the extension of your authority beyond the *due limits* prescribed by the *Revolution*; to call to your recollection the lessons and examples of former history; to reflect upon the instructive series of events that placed your family upon the throne of Britain; and finally to discriminate, with that rigid impartiality which can alone give stability to your Majesty's government, between your real and your pretended friends.

We conjure your Majesty, with that correctness and freedom which the awful crisis of our fate inspires, not to forget that wholesome and incontrovertible maxim—

“ That those who are hostile to the Rights and Liberties of the People, can never be real Friends to the just Prerogatives of the Crown.”

The interest of the People and their Chief Magistrate ought to be inseparable: but we conjure your Majesty seriously to reflect, how far this can possibly be the case, when restrictions are put upon the Liberties of the subject “ during the term of *your Majesty's natural life*,” which have never before been deemed necessary since the establishment of our constitution.—Neither can we, consistently with that constitutional loyalty we profess, take leave of this subject without reminding your Majesty of the *ominous circumstance* of the present measures being founded upon precedents (so far as precedents can any where

be found) in the Despotic Reigns of the Houses of Tudor and of Stuart, the latter of which precedents was so shortly followed by the Revolution that drove that House of Stuart from the Throne, and was indeed so materially instrumental in producing that event. We trust, whatever may be the evil counsels and evil projects of a desperate administration, that the House of Brunswick will not forget the PRINCIPLES, to which *they owe* their elevation; and we therefore subjoin, without fear of offence, or dread of imputation on our loyalty, the fond belief; that BRITONS have not yet relinquished either the Love of Liberty, or the Manly Courage which distinguished their ancestors at the period to which we have alluded.

And, finally, we conclude by petitioning your Majesty, to lay these things to your heart; to prevent the *possibility*, by preventing the NECESSITY of intestine commotion; and to instruct your Majesty's ministers (or such others as your Majesty in your wisdom may think proper to call to your councils) to turn their attention to the Redress of Existing Abuses, instead of laying *additional* Burthens and Restrictions upon your already oppressed and unhappy people!

Signed,

W. DUANE, Chairman.

J. ASHLEY, Secretary.

To the

To the Lords Spiritual and Temporal in Parliament assembled.

The Petition of several Thousand Britons, inhabitants of London, and its Environs, the firm and constitutional Assertors of British Liberty.

MAY IT PLEASE YOUR LORDSHIPS,

The people having no immediate connection with that particular branch of the legislature which is composed of your Lordships, further than as it forms a component part of the Constitution, it but rarely happens that you are addressed by *them*; or that they call for your assistance, to vindicate their rights, or repel the threatened encroachments of Ministerial ambition. But in the present alarming crisis, when almost all that remains of the constitution established at the Revolution of 1688, is openly attacked by a Bill introduced into Parliament by one of his Majesty's Ministers, a member of your honourable house; and another, equally alarming, which has been brought into the House of Commons, under the responsibility of his Majesty's Chancellor of the Exchequer, we should deem ourselves *inexcusable* if we neglected the opportunity of a solemn appeal to each of the respective branches of the legislature, to testify our deep sense of the threatened *invasion of our liberties*, and to remind our legislators of the *sacred ties* of reciprocal obligation that must ever exist between the government and the people; that, whatever may be the consequence of the present measures, our names may descend unsullied to posterity, and the universe bear witness that we have discharged the *duty of men*, who were anxious to preserve the peace and liberty of their country.

We present, therefore, for the first time, at the bar of your Lordships, and pray you to take into your most serious consideration, the alarming tendency, and probable consequences of the *coercive system*, now in the contemplation of the legislature, and of appealing to the authority of such times as those from which the framers of the impending Bills have thought fit to

draw their precedents. Is it to the arbitrary reigns of the Tudors that a people boasting the freedom of a renovated constitution are to look up for the *authorities* that are to restrict their rights, and new model their laws and institutions? Is it from the usurpations of the House of Stuart that *precedents* are to be drawn by the Ministers of that throne which was erected upon the ruins of the family that attempted, and *for a while* accomplished those USURPATIONS? If the times of the Stuarts were "*good times*," what were those ancestors who produced the *Revolution* of 1688, in order to change *those times*? If the conduct of the House of Stuart deserves the imitation of this enlightened age, what is the House of Brunswick, whose succession was secured by driving those Stuarts into *vagrant exile*?

We beseech your Lordships seriously to consider, whether, by countenancing such arguments, and adopting measures upon such precedents, you may not ultimately produce a *suspicion even in the Royal breast*, that your attachment to the House of Brunswick is not so sincere as for the peace of the nation might be wished? For how can they be sincerely attached to the *House of Brunswick*, who abjure the principles *which seated that House upon the throne*?

We conjure your Lordships, also, to consider, whether to suffer a Bill for the fabrication of new species and *genera* of treason—a Bill which does, in reality, repeal and annul these wise and excellent provisions extorted from Edward the Third, by the wisdom and persevering virtue of the independent Representatives of the People, to originate in your honourable House, is not, at *this* period, peculiarly impolitic, and calculated, if such prejudices as some of your Lordships seem to apprehend, have in *reality* arisen against the aristocratic branch of our Constitution, to give those prejudices *additional force*, and even to *create* such prejudices, if yet, as we presume, unknown?

To conclude, my Lords, permit your Petitioners to intreat your honourable House, to preserve the country from the manifold dangers, factions, conspiracies, and disturbances to which, in all human probability, those unconstitutional measures, if unhappily adopted, may give birth.

W. DUANE, Chairman.

J. ASHLEY, Secretary.

To the Honourable the Commons of Great Britain, in Parliament assembled.

The Petition of nearly *Four Hundred Thousand* Britons, Inhabitants of London and its Environs, assembled together in the open air, to express their free sentiments, according to the tenure of the *Bill of Rights*, on the subject of the threatened Invasions of their Constitutional Liberties!

MAY IT PLEASE YOUR HONOURABLE HOUSE,

Your Petitioners approach you, *once more*, to make their grievances and apprehensions known, in a legal and constitutional manner, to that branch of the legislature, which from its *legal style and firm*, was evidently intended to be the constitutional guardian of the people's liberties, and the champion of its rights and privileges! But we approach you, not as heretofore, to claim the reformation of *existing abuses*, for if those claims had been attended to, the cause of our present petition could never have existed. We come not to repeat our *unanswered* arguments on the necessity of Parliamentary Reform. The very introduction, by his Majesty's Ministers, of the measures we now protest against, is a demonstrative evidence of the necessity of such reform; but we approach you with constitutional reverence, and British firmness, to conjure you not to drive the people of this distressed and irritated nation to such despair, as the adoption of the coercive system in agitation before you, we are firmly persuaded, in the end, must inevitably produce.

We conjure this honourable House, the members of which still continue to style themselves the Representatives of the People, to remember that the vital energies of the British Constitution consist in the liberties of *Speech* and of the *Press*; that the safety and preservation of our lives and liberties (next after that immortal institution the Trial by Jury) depend upon the strict observance of the provisions of that admirable Statute of Treasons, extorted by a *virtuous* House of Commons from

Edward the Third. We conjure you also to remember, that the invasion of these liberties, and the violation of this safety, by arbitrary institutions, and new theories of constructive treasons, though sometimes assumed under pretence of ancient prerogatives, and sometimes confirmed by corrupt representatives, and arbitrary Acts of Parliament, have never failed of being productive of consequences the most alarming, both to the government and the people. That the adoption of those very maxims now quoted with exultation by his Majesty's Ministers, brought one unhappy Prince of the House of Stuart to the *scaffold*, and drove another with his posterity from the throne; and that, therefore, to propose and support such measures is, in reality, to endanger not only the tranquillity of the nation, but the safety even of his Majesty's person and government, in support of which these measures are said to be brought forward.

Permit us solemnly to conjure this honourable House to recollect the events that immediately preceded and produced the revolution of 1688—the doctrines advanced in justification of that memorable event, and the principles which established the House of Brunswick on the throne. Let us conjure you also to consider with due deliberation, the limits, and the sacred nature of that compact which exists between the government and the people; and the dreadful consequences that must inevitably ensue, if ever these limits should be violated, or this compact broken!

If these circumstances are duly considered, we feel a settled confidence, that the strong, and hitherto unparralleled attempts to destroy the personal security of the people of these realms, and annihilate the sacred rights of political discussion, which his Majesty's Ministers have had the boldness to avow, will meet with the decided disapprobation of this honourable House—that precedents drawn from the tyrannical reigns of the Tudors and the Stuarts, will be rejected with indignation; and that this honourable House will be struck with horror at the idea of *staining the memory* of the House of Brunswick, by the revival of those very measures which brought the House of Stuart into such general odium, and was productive of such intolerable oppression as to justify the resistance of the people, and produce that GLORIOUS REVOLUTION, upon the principles of which, and of which alone, the House of Brunswick is at this time entitled to the British Crown.

Your Petitioners therefore pray this honourable House to reconsider the purport and tendency of the Bill introduced upon the *responsibility* of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, for the Restriction, or rather the utter Prevention, of Popular Assemblies for the Purpose of Political Investigation, and to dismiss it with that marked disapprobation it so justly deserves;—to guard, with the most inviolable respect, that sacred institution the Trial by Jury;—and to suffer no arbitrary innovations, under any pretence whatever, on the existing Laws of Treason and Seditious—laws which have hitherto been found fully competent to all the just purposes of free and equitable government.

And, finally, we intreat this honourable House to believe, that when we profess our abhorrence of all tumult and violence, and reject with the utmost indignation the groundless calumnies that have been spread against our peaceful, orderly, and constitutional Meetings; we do it from a firm and long-settled conviction, that all acts of violence and outrage are most eminently injurious to that great cause of National and Constitutional Liberty to which we are attached. At the same time we conjure you to assure his Majesty's Minister, that the People of Britain have not degenerated from the spirit and bravery of their ancestors, nor forgot the important lessons inculcated by their examples.

Resolved, that the thanks of this Meeting be given to his Grace the Duke of Bedford, Lord Lauderdale, the Right Honourable Charles James Fox, Richard Brinsley Sheridan, Charles Grey, John Christian Curwen, Charles Sturt, and all those distinguished Members of the two Houses of Parliament, who, in the present hour of trial, have proved themselves to be the *true friends* of the Rights and Liberties of the People.

Resolved, that the thanks of this Meeting be given to the Whig Club, for their spirited proceedings and resolutions of yesterday; and to all those persons whose patriotic exertions have conduced to the accomplishment of the present happy unanimity among the Friends of Freedom.

Resolved, that the London Corresponding Society, and the other Friends of Liberty and Justice here assembled, entertain the most settled and decided abhorrence of all tumult and violence; that they respect the peace and happiness of society, and regard, therefore, with becoming reverence, the inviolability of all Magistrates, and others engaged in the *constitutional* discharge of their respective functions.

Resolved, That we deplore, in common with all true lovers of the genuine principles of Liberty and Order, the tumultuary excesses of an enraged and uninformed populace, on the first day of the present Session of Parliament; and mark with our most unequivocal censure that unhappy delusion which appears to have occasioned misguided individuals to direct their indignation against the Sovereign, for errors and misconduct which his Ministers alone ought to be rendered responsible; and that, not in a tumultuary, but in a legal and constitutional way:—a delusion which would never have existed, if the efforts of popular societies to illuminate the People had not been counteracted by unprincipled inquisitions and illegal persecutions.

Resolved, that the assertions of *certain persons in high station and authority*, that the insults offered to the person of the Chief Magistrate, in his passage to and from Parliament on that day originated in the Meeting held on the preceding Monday in the neighbourhood of Copenhagen-house, is a gross, unfounded, *WILFUL*, and treacherous calumny, invented by interested and designing persons (who perhaps know that these excesses originated from a *very different* quarter), to furnish them with a pretence for tyrannical usurpation, long before digested and determined upon.

Resolved, that we know how to cherish and to practice, in cases of the **LAST EXTREMITY**, the constitutional right of **RESISTANCE TO OPPRESSION**. We will exert our utmost endeavours on all occasions to repress all irregularity and excesses, and to bring the authors of such unjustifiable proceedings to the *just* responsibility of the law.

Signed,

W. DUANE, Chairman.
J. ASHLEY, Secretary.

The several Resolutions and Petitions having been read, and unanimously agreed to,

Citizen Jones addressed the Meeting, in a most impressive manner. To attempt a detail of his admirable speech is more than the limits of our paper will allow, and we must, therefore, content ourselves with giving a mere sketch or outline of it. He began by a solemn appeal to the Meeting on the momentous occasion which had called them together, and forcibly depicted the importance of it, by calling to their recollection that they were then met to petition the Legislature against the passing of an Act which, if once become a law, would totally annihilate every grand and essential privilege which, as En-

glishmen, they had hitherto prided themselves in possessing. He took particular notice of the many shameful and unfounded calumnies which had been industriously circulated against the London Corresponding Society, and especially pointed out the great injustice which had been done to that body of men by coupling with their last Meeting, and attaching it to the outrage which had been committed on his Majesty, on the first day of the Session, by a suffering, distressed, and deluded populace. He called every one to witness, and dared any one to deny it if he could, that the Corresponding Society had, from its commencement to the present hour, uniformly exerted its efforts in support of the People's Rights, in a manner which held forth a pattern to every one, for peace, order, and decorum. It was by a strict adherence to these modes alone, he said, that the friends to Freedom and Reform could ever hope to carry the great and important question for which they contended. He took a review of all the attacks which had been made upon the Constitution by the present Administration, and remarked, that, from one progressive stage to another, they had at last arrived to the present *acme* of despotic attempt, which could not fail to crown their efforts; for, if it took place, the Liberties of Englishmen were no more. He conjured the Meeting to reflect, that every thing dear to man was now at stake; they were either to submit, without a murmur, to every degree of taxation and degradation which could be put upon them, or, by their determined opposition to the present unheard-of and unprecedented measures, they were to oppose and resist them. It was a hard case, he thought, that a great and generous people, like that of England, should be plunged into a ruinous and desolating War, which has brought them to an abyss of misery and distress scarcely in the power of words to describe, and that in the very moment when this distress began most feelingly to operate, and that it might naturally be supposed the people would, of course, murmur and remonstrate at the wrongs and injuries they suffered,—unheard-of measures were adopted by Ministers, and brought forward for the sanction of the Legislature, to prevent suffering Misery from voiding a sigh or a groan, without incurring the high and mighty penalty of *transportation*. He expressed the utmost astonishment, that any set of men should so far have dared to infringe upon the Constitution, as settled at the Revolution of 1688, by which

the present family were eventually seated on the Throne ; and declared, that he hoped to see the day, when the Ministers, who had advised such arbitrary measures against the long-established rights and privileges of the people, would answer for it with their heads. In a word, he touched upon every point in which their proceedings were at the same time despotic, and without the shadow of truth as a foundation to ground them on ; and concluded a most animated and energetic address, by requesting, that the people would never dream of rest till, by their united and persevering efforts, they had got rid of a monster, which at once awakened the feelings of indignation and horror only to reflect on for a moment.

Several other Citizens spoke, with considerable force and energy ; and their addresses were received by the Meeting with the warmest and most unbounded applause. Citizen Thelwall was singularly happy in his allusions to and comments upon the *good times* from which the precedents were drawn on which the present Bills depending are founded, and shewed clearly that the reigns of the Tudors and the Stuarts are in perfect unison with the temper and disposition of the *immaculate heaven-born Minister* of the present day.

The last speaker was very flatteringly attended to, and concluded a speech, which was received with abundant applause, by an earnest exhortation to the Meeting, to keep in view the grand object on which they met, and remember that a peaceable departure from the place in which they then were, would be the greatest honour they could do themselves, and the most consummate triumph they could obtain over their numerous malignant enemies. This advice was certainly very strictly adhered to, for this astonishingly numerous assembly separated in the most cheerful manner, and evinced, beyond a possibility of doubt, that thousands of men may and can meet in so glorious and exalted a cause as that of their dearest Rights and Privileges, however their indignation may be roused against those who attack them, and still preserve their temper when patience is necessary. Like all former Meetings of this Society, and of the Friends of Freedom, each person returned to his respective home, in a manner which shewed that the presence of magistrates was altogether needless, and that the best security for keeping the peace, even where thousands are met, is the perfect knowledge of the Rights and Duties of Citizens.

